

9-1-1 Education Month – PODCAST 2

RUN TIME: 3 MIN, 32 SECONDS

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[Sound of several cell phones ringing.]

STEFANIE: Barb, you're the E-911 coordinator for the state. Can you explain your role?

BARBARA: Well, as the E-9-1-1 program manager for the state – the wireless program is handled at the state level. So I manage the network, make the decisions on how the calls are routed, all those things that you have to do with the network. I also work with all the legislation that spells out how we manage the program. The wire line program is handled at the local level. Each county has a E-9-1-1 service board. So everything filters through that board. They collect their own wire line surcharge. They manage their own network for the wire line side. So we actually have two separate networks in the state. But as the program manager, I oversee all of it – whether it's wire line or wireless – it's just I don't make as many decisions about the wire line network because they pay for it at the local level. Overall, it's just managing the program based on the legislation as it's written, and then of course, making the decisions on when we make enhancements to the program moving forward as technology changes.

STEFANIE: Speaking of technology changing, a lot of people nowadays – me included – don't have a home phone. I just rely on my cell phone. I know that a lot of other people are the same way – they've dropped their home phone, they just have the cell phone. How has that affected the 9-1-1 system? You say that you are overseeing the wireless part of that. Has that caused challenges for the program?

BARBARA: It has. The biggest challenge is when you have a wire line phone in your house, when you call from that phone, it comes up on the computer screens at the PSAP and it has your name and your address and your phone number, so that if you can't say anything, they have a way of getting to you. But on the wireless side, the technology's just a little bit different. It may just come up on the screen with your name and a phone number and it'll give the location of the tower that the call came in on – because it takes a little time for the technology to show where you are. So, a lot of times it's a little harder because people don't know where they are – and they can't tell them, they can't give them a cross street, or whatever. So it poses a lot more challenges, it takes a little bit more time for the call-taker to get the answers to the questions they need so they can send the help. And so it's very frustrating for both the call-taker and the person that's calling in to actually get somebody there to help them.

STEFANIE: So if you are calling on a cell phone and you don't know where you're at, eventually the towers and everything will figure out where you're at because the newer phones – are they required to have GPS?

BARBARA: Yes, they are. Any new phones are required to have GPS, but you still have the old phones out there that, you know, a lot of the sheriff's departments will say, you know, when you upgrade your phone, bring your old phone and donate it to their – like they give out to domestic abuse victims, or they'll give them out to the elderly. So there's still a lot of phones out there that do not have GPS in them that can still call 9-1-1. You should always try to somewhat know where you're at when you call. Just because the other thing is too, you know, if you don't have some kind of a landmark, even though we know their location, if you're down in a ditch and somebody drives by and can't see you–

STEFANIE: Mmm hmm.

BARBARA: ...You know, it still makes it hard to find you – because the location is only within a hundred meters. So you've still got quite a range there of trying to find somebody.

STEVEN: Mmm hmm. Yeah, as Barb said, it's pretty accurate. It can get down to about a hundred meters. So, you know, if you're on a highway and you're coming upon where the caller says they are – you pretty well find them right away. There can be instances where they might have gone off the road, or they're in an area where the cell towers can't really triangulate very well your location – they just can get a better idea of where you're at. Sometimes there is a little bit of a search involved to try and find them but for the most part, with the use of GPS and the towers, it is somewhat accurate, so–

STEFANIE: That's good.

[Sound of several cell phones ringing.]